



State of Connecticut
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Commission on Children



Connecticut Commission on Children

Minutes of Meeting, June 13, 2006

**Dining Room, Legislative Office Building
Hartford, Connecticut**

Voting members present: Judith A. Busch, James P. Cordier, Dr. Alex Geertsma, Senator Mary Ann Handley, Josh Piteo, Mary Grace Reed, Laura Lee Simon, Leslie Wolfgang, John Yrchik.

Ex-officio members or designees present: Anne Foley (Office of Policy and Management), Sylvia Gafford-Alexander (Department of Social Services), Norma Gyle (Department of Public Health), Mary Johnson (Department of Correction), Commissioner Peter O'Meara (Department of Mental Retardation.)

Members absent: Rudy Brooks (Department of Children and Families), George Coleman (voting member/Department of Education), Representative Andrew M. Fleischmann, Mary Fox, Alison Hilding, Representative Michael Lawlor, Judge Michael Mack (Chief Court Administrator), Senator Christopher Murphy, Susan Pearlman (Attorney General).

Commission staff present: Elaine Zimmerman, Thomas Brooks, Elizabeth Brown, Patricia Estill, Kevin Flood, Dawn Homer-Bouthiette, Rachel Levy and Edie Luciano.

Summer interns: Rachel Crotty and Daniel Soovajian

Honored guests: Andrea Comer, Representative Ken Green, Senate President Pro Tempore Donald Williams.

Handouts: Agenda; minutes of May 9, 2006 meeting; 2006 Legislative Session Summary; press release summarizing children's legislation, dated May 22, 2006; Early Language and Reading Success Key Facts; *Hartford Courant* editorial, "State Takes Reading Seriously," dated May 11, 2006.

Meeting Convened

Chairman James Cordier called the meeting to order at 10:10 a.m.

Chairman's Remarks

Mr. Cordier thanked the Commission and staff for what he called a very productive year for children's policies at the Capitol. One recently enacted law, P.A. 06-179, An Act Concerning State Investment in Prevention and Child Poverty Reduction, calls for spending a greater percentage of the state budget on programs proven to keep children out of crisis. Another new law, P.A. 06-63, An Act Concerning Healthy Food and Beverages in Schools, rids schools of unhealthy drinks during the school day and gives schools added incentive to provide healthy foods to students. Mr. Cordier referred Commission members to their packets for a report on the other measures adopted by the General Assembly this year.

Mr. Cordier also pointed to Commission accomplishments outside the Capitol. The success of the PLTI program, he said, led the Commission to launch ParentSEE, a program that gives parents the tools and confidence to become leaders in their children's schools. Already, it has had a profound impact, he said.

In addition, the commission has taken a strong lead in homeland security, Mr. Cordier said. Approximately 300 children came to the Capitol in January to express through writing and artwork their feelings about their safety in the wake of Katrina and the September 11 attacks. The work is under consideration for a book by Marian Wright Edelman, and some of it has been selected for posters by the state Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security (DEMHS). Commission Executive Director Elaine Zimmerman presented some of the work at a national conference in Chicago.

Mr. Cordier also noted that the Commission has spoken throughout the state on bullying, providing technical assistance to schools, parents, and youth on how to make schools safer and stronger. And thanks to funding from the National League of Cities and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, it is helping mayors learn how to strengthen local efforts to reduce child obesity, in collaboration with the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities.

Executive Director's Report

Ms. Zimmerman presented a year-end executive director's report. A core focus of the past year, she said, was capacity building; no public policy initiative was launched without key partners and public readiness for it. The Commission, working with DEMHS and the state Department of Education, drew approximately 3,000 responses when it asked schoolchildren to express their sense of safety through writing and artwork.

It became obvious, she said, that children are rarely asked to share their feelings about natural and unnatural disasters in a way that is purposeful. When they are, they say adults lag behind them on issues like diversity. More important, they say they do not feel safe. Their work reveals a merging in their minds of whatever violence they fear at home and in their neighborhoods with national or world events like Hurricane Katrina. Twenty years ago, these children would have been viewed as disturbed; it's clear now that the environment is disturbed. The Commission, with its commitment to civics, will continue to engage children on this issue.

Ms. Zimmerman reported that PLTI now operates in 12 communities, with others seeking to join. The program has generated 1.5 million hours of volunteer time. A statewide graduation ceremony for 125 parents who participated in the program this year will be held June 24 at the Legislative Office Building.

ParentSEE was launched, she said, after it was discovered that 40 percent of PLTI parents engage in education. The Commission partnered with the Center for School Change to create a curriculum, which was employed on a pilot basis last year in Bridgeport and Stamford. This year, it was expanded to New Britain, Windsor, and Norwalk.

Senator Williams Honored

Ms. Zimmerman presented Senate President Pro Tempore Donald Williams with a Commission award for his leadership in securing passage of the school nutrition bill in the 2006 legislative session. Senator Williams, in thanking the Commission for the award, said most lawmakers no longer view children's issues in isolation from other issues affecting the state. In the case of the nutrition bill, he said, they realized that poor health habits harm children both immediately and in the long term, laying the groundwork for adult health problems that drive up healthcare costs, which in turn harms the economy and subtracts from the resources available to deal with other issues. Senator Williams also called for government to find a different path for assisting children like those killed and injured in recent gun violence in Hartford. While increased police protection and after-school programs are important, he said, government must find a way to ensure that children in poor neighborhoods see the connection between education and the ability to secure good jobs and raise families. Too often, he said, the only people who show interest in them are gang leaders.

Other Awards

Ms. Zimmerman and Commission Legislative Director Elizabeth Brown also handed out awards to Andrea Comer, for her work as a consultant on a children's health program run jointly by the Commission and the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities, as well as Senator Mary Ann Handley and Representative Ken Green, for their leadership on a host of children's issues. Ms. Zimmerman then gave awards to several Commission members and designees in appreciation for their service, including Peter O'Meara, John Yrchik, Sylvia Gafford-Alexander, Norma Gyle, Mary Johnson, Anne Foley, Judith Busch, Josh Piteo, Laura Lee Simon, and Leslie Wolfgang.

Election of Officers

Dr. Alex Geertsma, chairman of the Nominations Committee, presented the committee's recommended slate of Commission officers for 2006-2007: James Cordier for chair, George Coleman for vice-chair, Mary Grace Reed for secretary, and Josh Piteo for treasurer. Dr. Geertsma noted that in compliance with Commission bylaws, nominations were opened to the floor at the May meeting and that no floor nominations were made.

Judith Busch made a motion to elect the Nominations Committee's recommended slate of officers. The motion was seconded by Mary Ann Handley. The full Commission voted unanimously, by voice, to elect the slate.

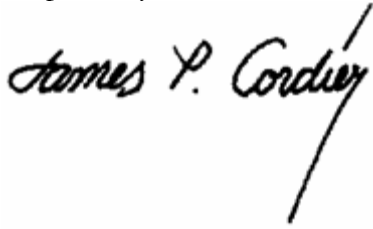
Minutes of the May 9 meeting

Judith Busch made a motion to accept the minutes of the May 9 meeting. The motion was seconded by Mary Ann Handley. The full Commission voted unanimously, by voice, to accept the minutes.

Closing

Mr. Cordier closed the meeting at 12:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James P. Cordier". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline that extends below the name.

James P. Cordier
Chair